

FAZENDA NOVA

C O U N T R Y H O U S E

Once upon a time...

Almost 14 years ago exactly Hallie and I bought Fazenda Nova. We were still living in North London and had no idea about the scale of the journey we were about to start. It wasn't love at first sight. Part of the house still stood, but it was crumbling away, literally. The cement render was crumbling away from the walls the moment you touched it. The roof beams had collapsed, the windows were shuttered and had been for decades. As we opened them, some fell off their frames, some only opened a small way. But as light poured in the rooms, we could see what it could become, as our house.

Because then that is what it was, our house, and, maybe some rooms to let out in the outbuildings. How naïve we were. 2 years later we left London. I sold my businesses and packed up everything we owned. Hallie continued to work even after we moved here, she commuted for two years. The children were 2, 4 and

7. Typing this I can see my eldest son Felix outside working at breakfast service, soon to start his first job in London and becoming an adult. So this his last summer holiday here with us as a schoolboy.

Outside we have guests from everywhere. Many from the US, mostly East Coast, we have a loyal following of customers that visit regularly, and new explorers to the Sotavento region. This is the true Algarve, the Eastern Algarve.

And it's very different from the other side of Faro with its resorts and condominiums. Like Fazenda, this region is real, authentic but packing a punch and a lot of surprises once you scratch the surface. I suppose you would describe us as eclectic, we have classic furniture like Vitra and Eames, Finn Juhl, sitting alongside Portuguese antiques.

We are 8 kilometres from the ocean yet we have our own beach, we love music and share our vinyl library and decks with guests. Wireless headphones on heads moving to different beats always makes me smile. If you make the trip you will not be disappointed, it's not what you think it is, it's so much more.

The story continues...

This is the time of the year I look forward the most. We already have harvested all the Carob fruit. That's not a job on the top of anyone's to do list: knocking the fruit off trees up to 60 ft tall with bamboo river cane polls in 95 degrees and sun-baked carobs raining down upon you... We use huge green nets for the fruit to drop into, then haul them in like fisherman pulling in sardines. By the end of first day everything aches and you look like you cut yourself shaving several times,

But that's the thing with nature, you have to do what needs to be done on

natures schedule, put it off and all the work you did all year could be wasted.

The best day is the last, 100's of sacks full off black Carob, smelling like chocolate. We sell the harvest to Nestle through a broker and we harvest in the same way it's have been done for centuries. Now that, that is a memory, it's the preparation for Olive harvest. We have been cleaning the bases of our trees of all the suckers, the wild branches growing from the bottom. That's because the trees that were here when we bought Fazenda Nova, which was a really important part of the decision to buy it, have up to 400 years old. The trees were wild and the farmers grafted Olive onto them. And you can clearly see the great marks in the bark still. Wild Olive roots are more robust than a cultivated species, most of ours are Manzanilla variety originally from Spain.

As a boy, I wanted to work for the forestry commission in Scotland. Well, I wanted to be a lumberjack. My parents were horticulturists and my Dad was a garden designer, now fashionably called a Landscape Architect. I just enjoy trees. They are like people to me, living sculptures. I was taught how to cut them by my 90-year-old neighbour Vitorino. He would watch me, for hours from his porch across the road. One time when clearly could bear it no more he made the arduous walk across the road. I watched him and I was nervous, yes. I know how to prune a tree, but i know that Mr Vitorino would be a master at his craft. Knowing when and where to cut to produce the best growth and the best fruit and also because most of the older residents in the village worked here or there parents or grandparents. I could have been vandalising a tree that he had known all his life.

My Portuguese then was enough to buy a coffee or beer, but I had Latin at school. He was holding a small tee saw, a "serrote" and brandishing at me and then the tree, then the sun and then the soil. "Estrangeiro, assim, não assim, compreende?" And bizarrely I knew what he was saying because my Latin teacher pretty much said the same to me often. Like this, not like this. And I knew what "Estrangeiro" meant because that's what everyone called me back then. I thought it was because I was a foreigner, but really it was because I didn't understand when people asked me my name, so they got fed up of asking and renamed me.

What I hadn't realised was that people were so surprised that "Estrangeiro", was cutting his own trees, or driving the tractor, planting an orchard because the "Dono", the owner of Fazenda Nova or any farm doesn't do that, they have the privilege of employing people do it. And that's because for me it is a hobby, a pastime and a passion. For them it had defined their lives, if they didn't they wouldn't eat. They had lived through the regime of Salazar. It was tough, no water system unless you dug or could afford a borehole. A tough frugal life. It had been hard. Why would I do it by choice? That's when they renamed me again. O "Maluco". It wasn't in malice, it was well natured. But I had to be tough and I had to make sure I was taken seriously and that I respected the land that I had bought. And being taken seriously I knew meant I had to do the work they

had done, at least for a few years. My good friend Miguel Campina stills calls me Fazendeiro. A worker on Fazenda. And I like it.

If you want to hear the story and a little more about Olive trees and Oil and Fazenda I was asked to be recorded by PodCast about it with Sports Scientist Dr Greg Wells, North American Sports Scientist legend and LifeStyle Guru and Master Trainer Reza Niam whom have held their Wellbeing retreats here. We had so much fun and as I do, I digressed and digressed until none of us really knew where it was headed but it was fun and I shared something about the trees here that has astounded many visitors and been dismissed by others. All I can say is that it all happened, I was there.... and it's changed my life, again.

Tim Robinson